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AUTHOR Mills, Belen C.; Stevens, Ann
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ABSTRACT

The Perception of Parents Interview Schedule was administered to 47 Caucasian, 4-year-old children from intact families to determine if mothers' employment status affected children's parental perceptions. Findings indicated that young children of employed mothers perceived their parents' roles differently from the children of nonemployed mothers. Differences appeared in the children's perceptions of the same-sex parent. Daughters of employed mothers perceived their mothers to be the smarter parent, the parent who most often gave them treats, and the parent they depended on most for help and protection. Sons, regardless of mother's employment, perceived fathers as the smarter parent. Daughters and sons perceived the father to be the boss of the house. The children wanted to grow up to be like their same-sex parent. (RH)

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PARENTAL ROLE PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH EMPLOYED AND NONEMPLOYED MOTHERS

by

Belen C. Mills, Ed.D.*

and

Ann Stevens, Ph.D.**

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*Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education, Florida State University

**Home and Family Life, Consultant

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine if mother's employment status affected children's parental perceptions. The following hypotheses were rejected using the .05 apha level as the criterion:

1. There is no difference in four year old children's perceptions of their employed or nonemployed mothers.
2. There is no difference in four year old children's perceptions of their fathers whose wives are employed or nonemployed.
3. There are no significant differences between the perceptions held by male and female four year old children toward their parents.

The Perception of Parents Interview Schedule was administered to 47 Caucasian, four year old children from intact families. Differences appeared in the children's perceptions of the same-sex parent. Daughters of employed mothers, perceived their mothers to be the smarter parent, the parent who most often gave them treats, and the parent they depended on most for help and protection. Sons, regardless of mother's employment perceived their fathers as the smarter parent, and daughters and sons perceived their fathers as "the boss of the house." The children wanted to grow up to be like their same-sex parents.

Parental Role Perceptions of Young Children
with Employed and Nonemployed Mothers

An increasing number of mothers of young children are joining the labor force. From 1970 to 1981, the ratio of women with children under six working outside the home increased from 30.3% to 47.8%. Also there were another 7.9% to 8.2% seeking employment (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1982). Fifty five per cent of working mothers with preschool children place their children during the day in someone else's care, outside of their home, (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1984). This return to the labor force has reduced the time mothers spend caring for their young children. It has also increased their dependence on others for child care.

Some educators have expressed their concerns over the effect of these conditions on young children's behaviors and development. White (1981) believed that most children get off to a better start in life when they spend most of their waking hours being cared for by their parents. Kagan (1979) stated that a close parent-child bond is needed to make children more receptive to their families' values. It appears that it is easier for the child to imitate modeled behaviors when there is a one-to-one relationship between the child and the adult (Frances and Self, 1982).

The modeling of adult roles begins with the mother as the role model. The modeling changes as an awareness of sex identity develops (Maccoby, 1959; Lynn, 1969; Frances and Self, 1982). With the child care personnel performing as additional role models, concerns arise about their roles.

Alvin Mahrer (1978) wrote that children's personhood reflects their parent's attributes. He believed that the addition of a major caretaker would add a new set of attributes. He thought that ~~a new~~ caretaker would likely alter the child's personhood.

Young children do practice and often adapt behaviors they observe. Since children's behavior is determined to a large extent by their perceptions, the investigators posed some of their concerns, "When mother works outside the home, does it affect young children's view of the roles of the mother and the father in the family?" "Would children view their mother's role or father's role differently if mother is employed or non-employed?"

Cognizant therefore of the role of perception in determining children's behavior, a study of young children's perception as they relate to maternal employment is significant.

Purpose

This study was conducted to determine if the mothers' full time employment status (40-45 hours per week) affected the children's perceptions of parental roles.

The following hypotheses were tested and the .05 alpha level was used as the criterion for their rejection:

1. There is no difference in four-year-old children's perceptions of their employed or nonemployed mothers.
2. There is no difference in four-year-old children's perceptions of their fathers whose wives are employed or nonemployed.
3. There are no significant differences between the perceptions held by male and female four year old children toward their parents.

Subjects:

The subjects were 47 four-year-old Caucasian children who were living with both parents in Leon County, Florida. They were divided into subgroups according to the employment status of their mothers and according to their sex. The 21 children, 10 male and 11 female, of the nonemployed mothers were cared for at home by their mothers. They ranged in age from 46 months to 60 months. The median age of the boys was 51 months and for the girls 55 months. The 26 children, 10 male and 16 female, of employed mothers were cared for in commercial, licensed day care centers. The children of employed mothers had been in day care centers from 12 to 50 months. The average length of time the boys attended the center was 39.5 months and for girls was 35 months. They ranged in age from 48 months to 58 months. The median age of the

males was 53 months. The median age of the females was 54 months. The subjects were primarily first and second-born children.

The mothers were 26 years to 49 years old with a median age of 31 years for mothers of males, and 32.5 years for mothers of females. All of the mothers had graduated from high school. Some 33% of the nonemployed mothers had graduated from college while 19% had graduated from a post-college program. Some 35% of the employed mothers had graduated from college while 35% graduated from a post-college program. The employed mothers worked full-time (40-45 hours per week) in several occupational areas: professional (58%), managerial (8%), and technical (35%).

The fathers ranged in age from 27 years to 48 years. The median age for the fathers of males was 33 years. The median age for the fathers of females was 34 years. All of the fathers had completed high school. Of the fathers with an employed wife, 46% had graduated from college, and 38% had completed a post-college program. Of the fathers with a nonemployed wife, 31% had graduated from college, and 24% had completed a post-college program. The fathers with employed wives were working in professional (42%), managerial (23%), technical (19%), and sales (8%) positions. The fathers with nonemployed wives were working in professional (48%), managerial (24%), technical (19%) and sales (10%) positions. Thus it appears that the

two groups of fathers had similar positions on the occupational scale.

Instrument:

The Perception of Parents Interview Schedule (Kagan and Lemkin, 1960) was administered to the children. The Schedule was divided into three sections. They are the indirect method, indirect picture method and direct method. The indirect and direct methods utilize the same questions about a fictional family and real family. The indirect picture method used a drawing with a missing parent participating in an activity with the child.

Examples of items on the Perception of Parents Interview Schedule are:

Who gives the boy/girl the most presents?
Who gives you the most presents?
Who is going for a walk with the boy/girl?

The data were analyzed through the use of the discriminant analysis and Cramer' V Degree of Association. The discriminant analysis used weighted scores to determine if there were differences between the samples. The Cramer's V used a chi square statistic to describe the degree of agreement between the samples.

Results and Discussion:

The hypothesis that there is no difference in four-year-old children's perception of their employed or nonemployed mothers was rejected. As seen in Table 1, there were areas of significant disagreement. The daughters of employed mothers believed that the mother was

the smarter parent more often than did the daughters of nonemployed mothers (P=.022). Perhaps the daughters of employed mothers see their mothers as more capable of succeeding in society. If this is true, then this may strengthen the self-concepts of daughters of working mothers.

Insert Table 1 here

Also, the daughters of employed mothers stated that their mothers gave them treats more often than did the daughters of nonemployed mothers (P=.002). This may indicate that the giving of special treats is seen as a part of the mother's nurturing role by the daughters of employed mothers. Perhaps the employed mothers tried harder to please their children because they had less time to spend with their children.

There were differences in the mother-daughter activities expressed by the daughters of employed and nonemployed mothers. The daughters of employed mothers stated that the mother played outside with them more often than did the daughters of nonemployed mothers (P=.047). This probably indicates that employed mothers feel the need to spend time with their children outside of the care-giving activities. On the question of protection, the daughters of employed mothers stated that they would go to their mothers for protection more often than did the

daughters of nonemployed mothers (P=.049). Perhaps this is because the daughters of employed mothers perceived their mothers to be strong and capable of taking charge of situations more so than did the daughters of nonemployed mothers.

The hypothesis that there is no difference in four-year-old children's perception of their fathers whose wives were employed or nonemployed was rejected. As seen in Table 1, there were areas that showed significant disagreement. The sons of employed mothers fantasized that the fathers played outside with his son more often than did the sons of nonemployed mothers (P=.047). This may indicate that the sons of employed mothers feel the need to emphasize the male role in their lives. Sons do perceive the activity of playing outside with their fathers as being of the "father" role (Kagan and Lemkin, 1960; and Dowell, 1970).

Both the sons and daughters of employed and nonemployed mothers wanted to grow up to be like their same-sex parent (P=.0000). The children stated that the fictional child wanted to grow up to be like their same-sex parent (P=.0001). This indicates that the children were aware of their sex identity and wanted to meet the appropriate characteristics for their future adult role.

In addition, the data from the Perception of Parents Interview Schedule was compared for difference between the sexes. As seen in Table 2, there were significant differences between the boys' and girls'

perceptions of parental roles.

Insert Table 2 Here

The boys and girls chose their same-sex parent as the parent they would like to grow up to be like (P=.0000), and as the parent who gives ice cream cones (P=.0097) more often than the opposite-sex parent. The girls chose the mother as the parent who was the smartest (P=.0412) more often than did the boys. The boys chose the father as the best liked parent (P=.0276) and the parent who most often played outside with them (P=.0496) more often than did the girls. The choice of the same-sex parent is an indication of the child's attention to the same-sex parent as the primary role model. Young children tend to imitate the behaviors of the same-sex parent. These are the behaviors they believe to be characteristic of the same-sex parent (Carlson, 1984). On the question "Who is the boss of your house?", most of the boys and girls agree that the father is the "boss of the house" though more girls stated that both parents were "boss of the house", (P=.0279).

The data from the Perception of Parents Interview Schedule shown in Table 3 was included to show the degree of agreement between the responses given by both sexes. High agreement value is defined as .07 or less, where 1.00 means no agreement. As shown in Table 3, the boys and girls agreed that the mother was the parent they liked

best (V=.061), and kissed more often (V=.054) than the father. The children stated that the mother tucked them in bed (V=.048), and cared for them when they were sick (V=.064) more often than the father. This is in accord with the findings of earlier researchers who found that young children perceived the mother to be the more loving parent (Emmerich, 1959; Kagan and Lemkin, 1960; and Dowell, 1970).

Insert Table 3 Here

Both boys and girls thought that the father was the strongest parent (V=.016). In addition the children agreed that the father was the parent they were afraid of (V=.039), and the parent who spanks the children (V=.064). The parent the children became most angry with was the father (V=.023). This supports earlier research that found the fathers to be the strong, controlling parent (Emmerich, 1959; Kagan and Lemkin, 1960; and Dowell, 1970).

In summary, the findings indicate that young children of employed mothers perceived their parents roles differently from the children of nonemployed mothers.

It appears that daughters of employed mothers, perceive their mothers differently than daughters of nonemployed mothers. They view their mothers to be the smarter parent, the parent who most often gave them

treats, and the parent they depended on most for help and protection. However, sons, regardless of mothers employment, perceived their fathers as the smarter parent. Also, regardless of mothers employment, most of the children perceived their fathers as "the boss of the house". Perhaps the children's perception of their father as the stronger parent, the punisher, and the one they are scared of, may account for this finding.

Sons of employed mothers more often than sons of nonemployed mothers felt a need to play with their fathers. This may indicate a need to reinforce their male role model perceptions. Both groups identified with the same sex as role models.

While some of these findings are in accord with those of others it would be unwise to generalize beyond the middle class, Caucasian group from which the subjects came.

Educational Implications:

The results of this study indicate that sex stereotyping exists in young children. The traditional expectations of males and females persist in our society. The findings of this research maybe helpful in examining the causes of sex stereotyping in young children. The findings indicate that young girls are changing their images of their mothers. This appears especially true when the mother presents a different role model of a female; that of a primary wage earner. The findings do indicate that when roles of females are expanded, young

children's perceptions of sex roles do change. Educators and curriculum developers as well as textbook writers, should include the expanded roles of females and males by emphasizing:

(a) the changing roles of males and females

(b) the varying roles of males and females

(c) the dangers of stereotyping and how to combat it

Since stereotypes, like superstitions, are often ingrained at an early age, it is a task of the school to teach children to examine them and to challenge children to check their validity.

From a mental health point of view, the inclusion of the expansion of the roles of females and males in the curriculum would provide children, early in life, options for choosing personally satisfying occupations and roles; not roles based on stereotypes.

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Table 1

Areas of Disagreement Between the Responses of Children with an Employed or Nonemployed Mother on the Perception of Parent Interview Schedule

Item	Sample	Mother	Father	Both Parents	Total	V*	P
Who is the smartest?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	0	9	1	10	.036	.0222
	Female	9	7	0	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	1	7	2	10		
	Female	2	8	1	11		
Who plays outside with the child?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	0	10	0	10	.368	.0476
	Female	7	7	2	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	3	4	3	10		
	Female	2	6	3	11		
Who does the child want to grow up to be like?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	3	7	0	10	.541	.0001
	Female	13	1	2	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	1	8	1	10		
	Female	10	0	1	11		
Who is giving the child an ice cream cone?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	4	5	1	10	.474	.0018
	Female	13	3	0	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	1	4	5	10		
	Female	4	6	1	11		
Who is the child running to for help?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	4	6	0	10	.366	.0494
	Female	10	4	2	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	2	3	5	10		
	Female	3	4	4	11		
Who do you want to grow up to be like?							
	Maternal Employment						
	Male	2	8	0	10	.061	.0000
	Female	14	0	2	16		
	Maternal Nonemployment						
	Male	0	9	1	10		
	Female	9	1	1	11		

* V = degree of association

Table 2

Areas of Disagreement Between Males and Females on the Perception of Parents Interview Schedule

Item	Sex	Mother	Father	Both Parents	Total	V*	P
Who is the smartest?							
	Male	1	16	3	20	.213	.0412
	Female	11	15	1	27		
Who does the child want to grow up to be like?							
	Male	4	15	1	20	.373	.0000
	Female	23	1	3	27		
Who is giving the child an ice cream cone?							
	Male	5	9	6	20	.222	.0097
	Female	17	9	1	27		
Who is the boss at your house?							
	Male	8	12	0	20	.195	.0279
	Female	8	11	8	27		
Who do you want to grow up to be like?							
	Male	2	17	1	20	.416	.0000
	Female	23	1	3	27		
Who plays outside with you?							
	Male	2	12	6	20	.189	.0496
	Female	8	7	12	27		
Who do you like best?							
	Male	7	9	4	20	.196	.0276
	Female	13	3	11	27		

*V = degree of association

Table 3

Areas of Agreement Between Males and Females on the Perception of Parents Interview Schedule

Item	Sex	Mother	Father	Both Parents	Total	V*
Who is the strongest?						
	Male	1	19	0	20	.016
	Female	1	26	0	27	
Who does the child like best?						
	Male	10	9	1	20	.061
	Female	14	10	3	27	
Who is the child more scared of?						
	Male	5	10	5	20	.030
	Female	6	13	8	27	
Who takes care of the sick child?						
	Male	13	4	3	20	.064
	Female	20	5	2	27	
Who is the child mad at?						
	Male	6	12	2	20	.023
	Female	7	17	3	27	
Who kisses you the most?						
	Male	12	5	3	20	.054
	Female	19	5	3	27	
Who spanks you the most?						
	Male	5	11	4	20	.064
	Female	4	17	6	27	
Who are you more scared of?						
	Male	4	9	7	20	.039
	Female	4	12	11	27	
Who tucks you in bed at night?						
	Male	10	7	3	20	.048
	Female	13	8	6	27	

*V = degree of association